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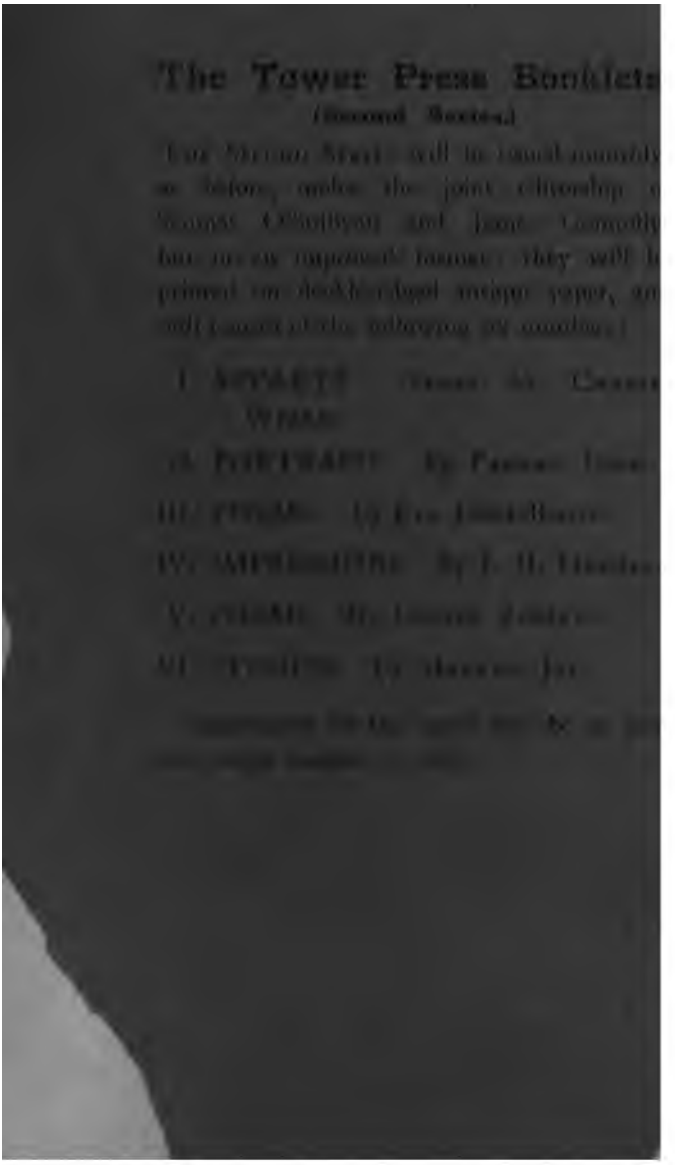
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PREFACE.

WHATEVER be thought of the literary and philological claims of the Irish language, it cannot be denied that the "Language Movement" brings into prominence an aspect of Irish nationality of which a good many Irishmen have hitherto been content to ignore the existence. Dragged from obscurity in the hovels of the West, like the forgotten representative of some old dynasty restored by a sudden revolution, the ancient language of this country hears itself saluted as "Our own Tongue," "The *Irish* Language," even in the presence of that rival who has supplanted it, and who is now so securely established as the language of the country that it can afford to wink at these pretensions and even to extend municipal hospitalities to Gaelic in the decayed but still haughty capital of the Ascendancy. "Irish" Language is indeed only a title of courtesy: the ancient language of the Celt is no longer the language of Irish nationality. And in fact it never was.

A visitor commissioned to describe this country in the style and spirit of Cæsar would perhaps report that all Ireland is divided into three parts, of which the Anglo-Irish form one, the Scotch-Irish another, while the third is formed of what we may call, borrowing the phrase from Mr. H. G. Wells, the peasant hinterland. These, he would probably continue, do not differ in language, institutions,

or laws, but are at variance in matters o
religion and history. Each of these, he migh
add, is concerned chiefly, as is natural, wit
its own interest, the northern portion bein
almost morosely so concerned : in fact, Pres
byterian Ulster—being the only part of Irelan
which really knows its own mind—hardly an
longer keeps up the pretence of forming por
tion of an ideal Irish nation. It was wit
the Anglo-Irish, on the other hand, that th
idea of an Irish nation originated. But th
word "nation," as adopted by Grattan an
Sir Jonah Barrington, sounded a little defian
and tentative ; and presently, with the sudde
emergence into political significance of a ne
and almost unsuspected Irish nationality in th
time of O'Connell, the claim to nationhoo
died out among the Anglo-Irish. The soli
word "nation" gave place to the flimsy an
doctrinaire word "nationalism". Yet th
Anglo-Irish have never wholly lost thei
aspirations after nationality ; with seven hun
dred years of history behind them, and wit
so many glorious names in literature an
politics, they feel that they should transcen
provinciality. It is this, for example, whic
keeps them loyal to a faded viceregal cour
still gilded with a certain grace of th
old *régime* ; and it is to the desire to ad
some grace of nationality to provincial li
that the cause of reviving the ancient languag

of the peasant hinterland makes its appeal.

No man calls himself an Irishman without some attribution of nationality to the Irish people as a whole; but it is idle to deny that the nationality which most of us have in our mind is one which has its nucleus in the Anglo-Irish population rather than in the peasant hinterland. That hinterland it was indeed the mistake of the Anglo-Irishman to ignore in the days when he arrogated to himself the lofty title of "nation": forgetting the political lesson implied in the maxim of Mencius, "To conquer the peasantry is the way to become the son of heaven!" He did not realize that to impart language, institutions and laws is not to impart nationality, but that it is from the peasantry that he derives nationality. And so when democratic ideas invaded Ireland at the end of the 18th century, and presently gave an independent political existence to the peasant hinterland, the political ideas of that factitious "nation" of which Grattan was the slightly histrionic spokesman and Sir Jonah the fitting historian, shrivelled like an unrooted plant, and the Anglo-Irishman sank into provincial apathy. All through the 19th century he has been little more than a spectator of Irish political life, abandoning to the peasant hinterland the cause of nationality, and in his dilemma between nationalism and provincialism is a butt

for the sarcasm of those who, not without some justification, call their own division of the population "Irish Ireland", and the Anglo-Irishman "West-British". As he stands in this uneasy situation, the first overture from the Celtic hinterland comes to him in the proposal that he should join in reinstating the ancient language of the country, and, at the risk of seeming a little ridiculous, he has felt constrained of late to give some attention to the matter. Strictly speaking, it is not for language and literature, but rather for the thews and sinews of nationality, that we should look to the peasantry: on the contrary, it is fitting that the peasantry should have the language of a superior culture imposed upon them. Where the peasantry, or the main body of a population, receives that superior culture and civilization, the product is a genuine nationality: and however defiantly both Grattan and Parnell may have vociferated that Ireland is a nation, it has never been one in this sense.

An indigenous culture, or an inner life of some kind, is that which gives individuality to a people. The true justification of the claim to nationality is nothing more or less than the discovery of the possibilities of human nature in a community of which the geographical situation is sufficiently favourable—a discovery which has never been made in Ireland. The old Celtic nationality has not made it, and for

that reason has remained an outcast from the family of European nations, inheritors and preservers of the Promethean fire; nor has the nationality of the Anglo-Irish, with whom it chiefly rested to make it, as the heirs of a superior culture. All the elements of nationality exist in Ireland, yet until a discovery of this kind has connected Irish nationalism with universal and essential interests, a share in Irish national aspirations will continue to be, not the neccessary mark of a good citizen, but rather, at best, a development of good nature or special circumstances. It is by a "thought movement" rather than by a "language movement" that Ireland will have to show that it holds the germs of true nationality.

The cry of nationalism, in the traditional sense of the word, has now, it is to be feared, a belated sound. The day of nations—those imposing entities the report of whose doings still casts a glamour over the daily papers, those Titan friends of humanity each one of which has had its peculiar part in carrying forward the human cause—the day of nations, we have begun to suspect, is passing away. The day of those institutions for which we have at present no more high-sounding names than "local self-government," "municipal trade," "international arbitration," and the like, is already in progress—the period which from the point of view of the consummations of

the future will perhaps appear as the democratic middle ages. We begin to demur to the romantic wars into which the touchiness of these old Titans toward one another hurries us against our interest and our will, and to feel content that they should go. Much of what is grandiose and sacrosanct will go with them, and it will rest with the smaller nations to keep alive certain graces and sentiments which belong to nationality, in a world surrendered to individualism and commonsense. The history of Ireland, if it shows any hopeful tendency, shows a tendency toward the achievement of national unity—for the first time; and it is those who have the national unity of Ireland at heart who are most likely to remain cold toward a plan for perpetuating the division of Ireland into two rival populations, having, like the Jews and the Samaritans, "no dealings" with one another. After all it was amongst the "lost sheep of the house of Israel"—amongst those who had lost the use of the Hebrew language—that the Jewish Messiah appeared. It was not the ancient language of the chosen people that gave expression to the most illustrious example of the fulfilment of a national dream, and it would be in keeping with the ironies of history if the fulfilment of the Gaelic dream should test the acumen of believers in a similar fashion.

A NEGLECTED MONUMENT OF IRISH PROSE.

THE question, Why did Ireland reject the Bible? is closely connected with another question, Why did Ireland fail in literature? not so much that Ireland's final rejection of the Bible was the cause of its failure in literature, as that both of these things have come of a peculiarity of her spiritual history from the earliest times—the complete separation in it of things sacred and things profane. In all countries literature begins to be national with a claim made on behalf of the people to think for themselves. It was so in England in the age of Chaucer, Langland, and Wyclif. It was so in France a century earlier when Jean de Meung, in his continuation of the Romance of the Rose, initiated the people, not without a good deal of scandal, into a "philosophy wholly emancipated from theology." But literature in Ireland never took the great questions of life and destiny into its own hands. The people, in the person of any great reformer or poet, never claimed the right to think. No genius ever arose out of the gulf set between things sacred and things profane. The literatures of France and England grew up with the freedom of thought, and finally became the national organs for the expression of the mind of those nations; but

Ireland, more and more in the course of its history, has abandoned thought and speculation to a religious order holding itself aloof, or at any rate distinct, from the national life. Irish literature and Irish religion have maintained two distinct and partly hostile traditions; so that it has been the curious destiny of Ireland, not only to have been the "Island of Saints," one of the chief refuges of Christianity in the early Middle Ages, but to be the last home in Europe of what we call Paganism, the country where the kind of life portrayed in primitive literatures has lasted longest.

The great national book of the Hebrews seemed at one time likely enough to become in Ireland, what it has been in so many countries, the begetter of an original literature. Patrick and Finn Barr, it is told, went about the country distributing the Gospels and the Books of the Law. Ancient Irish literature, by the very form of its annals and many of its narratives, bears witness to the familiarity of those who wrote it down with the Hebrew Scriptures. Ireland, at the close of the seventh century, when Christianity lay brooding here in a sort of halcyon calm and a gentler temper fell upon its bards and heroes; that Ireland into which the poem of Prince Aldfrid of Northumbria gives us a glimpse, "Inisfail the Fair"—that inoffensive, pensive Ireland, where all things were going well, on which Fate, without a

particle of provocation, suddenly let loose her yelling dogs of destruction, her Danes and Saxons—if it could only have continued! Those, indeed, were Ireland's palmy days, and let no ruthless historian destroy her belief in them. It was long afterwards, in the twelfth century, after her first sorrows had come upon her, that Ireland, north and south, passed under the regular authority of the Church of Rome. This silent and gradual supplanting of the once glorious national Church of Erin, whatever this country may have gained through being thus brought within the community of European nations, was yet the symbol of an end which had come to much that was most promising in our earlier history. The bond of union between national and ecclesiastical life disappeared with the nationality of the Church. In literature it widened the breach between things sacred and profane. Popular literature fell wholly into the hands of the bardic order, an institution pertaining to the childhood of nations, and which Ireland, in the ordinary course of its development, was beginning to outgrow. For it was not only Edward III. in his Statute of Kilkenny (which, by the way, like the Anglo-Norman invasion, was supported by ecclesiastical authority), or Edmund Spenser, in his "View of the State of Ireland," who pronounced this standing army of poets to be the bane of the country in several

respects; but soon after the curtain rises on the regular narrative of Irish history, we find the authorities of Erin assembled to consider the best method of dealing with what had become a public nuisance. As Keating says:—"These professors were become very chargeable to the inhabitants, and being of a covetous disposition were a grievance insupportable to the people; and upon account of the privileges and immunities enjoyed by these versifiers, a third part of the whole kingdom passed under the notion of poets for it was a plausible cover to idleness and ease, it being ordained by law that they should be supported by other men's labours, and billeted upon the people throughout the island from Samhain to May."* The Ard-Righ of that time, Aodh Mac Ainmire, wished to do away with this outrageous institution, but at the suggestion of Columcille, whose political influence was then great, their numbers were reduced, and many of them were turned into schoolmasters. King Aodh's proposal was so energetic and drastic that one would like to know more of an Irish

*The following passage in Gosson's "School of Abuse," written in the spacious times of great Elizabeth (1579), serves to show that other nations have been slow in disestablishing their bardism:—"We have infinite poets, and pipers, and suche peevishe cattel among us in Englande, that live by merrie begging, mainteyned by almes, and privily encroach uppon everie man's purse. But if they that are in authoritie, and have the swords in their handes to cut off abuses, shoulde call an accompt to see how many Chirons, Terpandri, and Homers are heere, they might cast the summe without pen or counters and sit downe with Racha, to weepe for her children, because they were not."

statesman who seems to have been as free from sentimentalism as Edward I. And as it turned out, the settlement of Drum-Ketta was by no means the end of the abuses of the bardic order. Right down to the Penal times we we hear of them chiefly as bullies, braggarts, and scamps, and we may be sure that whatever poetry the bardic class, as a class, produced, was as paltry as some of their "satires," etc., which have come down to us. Their very notion of a poet as the member of a kind of guild, or bardic order, precluded the emergence of a great poetic individuality much in the same sense and to the same extent as a rigidly-established priestly order precludes the emergence of a new spiritual initiative. The true poet, as we now see, is depressed and silenced by the necessity to conform; and we may conjecture that many a poetic soul in Erin remained mute and inglorious, or what was worse, became loud and turgid, through having to accept the traditions of the bardic caste. The bards seem always to have been afraid of being too serious. Any consideration of the mysteries of existence, or any aim at inspiring men with high and consolatory thoughts, they left to the dull fellows who gave themselves up to the recital of psalms and prayers. They gave Ireland for its ideal the jolly fellow, subsequently incarnated in the heroes of Lever and Lover. The only virtues

which they never wearied of praising, hospitality and generosity, were those by whose superstitious exercise they were themselves enabled to maintain their useless existence. Sin é an tseut mar fuair mise é, agus má tá briseas inr an tseul, bíod!

The existence in Ireland of two large communities of men, one religious, the other non-religious, and, to a certain extent, anti-religious, was impossible without a certain rivalry and hostility arising between them. The clerics learned more and more to scorn and hold aloof from the bards, whose idleness and abuse of privileges they justly censured, while the bards retaliated by contrasting the glories of an heroic age with the times in which they were fallen. It is surprising to some when they learn for the first time that a section of Gaelic literature which seems most ancient in its thought and spirit, those Ossianic ballads in which pagan life is so forcibly contrasted with the ascetic and devotional, should belong to more recent centuries. The hardihood of Oisin in dialogue with Patrick surprises us to this day. In these poems the bards went so far as they dared with a people whose affections they held, while the Church retained the people's veneration. Meanwhile, between the bards and the priests, "the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed." When the Reformation came it was needed in Ireland,

at least as much as elsewhere ; less, indeed, on account of any great ecclesiastical abuses, than because of the sad lethargy into which the mind and spirit of the nation were fallen. Yet there seemed no way of reaching the national consciousness ; no way, except one, and that was by translating the Bible into the Irish language.

Small blame to the people of Ireland that they did not accept the Reformation as it was offered to them—that they refused to regard the gentleman or lady on the throne of England as the Head of their Church in preference to the remote and mysterious Bishop of Rome. Yet as regards the welfare of the language it would have been better if they could have consented to do so. It is not generally known that an early enthusiast for the Irish language was Queen Elizabeth, who seems to have advanced far enough in the study of it to encounter difficulties which indisposed her to add to her royal cares the considerable one of mastering the tongue. It is true this inclination of Queen Elizabeth for the Irish language was not altogether disinterested. Having been excommunicated by the Pope, one of the first acts of reprisal which had occurred to her was to convert the Irish language into an engine against the Papacy. She made a personal matter of it too, for it was her own money which paid for the fount of

type which was almost the beginning of Irish printed literature. In 1603, eight years before the English authorised version, the New Testament appeared in Irish, translated directly, with the aid of scholarly men, from the Greek. There can be little question that if self-interests had not interfered, the Bible in Irish would have won its way into the affections of a spirited and intellectual people, and the language would have had the nucleus of a serious modern literature, the lack of which has caused it to be cast aside by successive generations of Irishmen as they have emerged into the air of free thought and universal interests. The proposal was defeated, perhaps chiefly by the Irish Goverment, who dreaded the publication of a book which they feared would create a soul in the nationality which they sought to destroy; and, secondly, by the Catholic priesthood, who now for the first time began to take an interest in "literature for the people," and who printed on the Continent (partly, it appears, from Elizabeth's type, which they had got hold of) the first of those thought-abnegating books of pietism which have been so poor a substitute for the antique insight and severe agnosticism of the Bible. Soon after, the dreadful incidents of the Plantations and Rebellions fixed Protestant and Catholic in enmity toward one another, and the cause of nationality became and has

remained to this day, in the main, the cause of pre-Lutheran ecclesiasticism. The printing of the Old Testament in 1685 was due mainly to the philosopher, Robert Boyle; as is well known, the translation had been begun under the care of the good Bishop Bedell, and it, too, is a direct translation from the original. But the country, under the direction of its spiritual guides, would have none of it, and its circulation was left to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, which arose at the end of the century. There is something perhaps a little pathetic in the naïve assurance of those monarchs, philosophers, and bishops who interested themselves in the enterprise, that the Hebrew Bible, translated into the tongue of the Gael, would be irresistible. It is hardly on its literary merits or by authority of its spiritual wisdom, that a book recommends itself to the hearts of the people. Even in Wales, where there was not the same political or religious division between government and nationality as in this country, the translation of the Bible had for a long time very little effect in stopping the decay of the language; and the Bible of Bishop Lloyd would probably have had much the same destiny as Bishop Bedell's, had not the institution of Sunday schools by the Methodists obliged little boys and girls, no doubt very reluctantly, to study it and learn it by heart.

Few Irishmen will admit that Ireland would have been made a more interesting and agreeable country by an evangelical movement which would have introduced Bedell's Bible into every cottage; but it was probably at the cost of her ancient language, as well as of some other things, that Ireland kept her religious tradition unbroken.

THAT "East is East and West is West"—in other words, that human nature in the East and human nature in the West are essentially different—is accepted usually as a sufficient account of the fact that what we call "universal" religions have as yet appeared only in the East. The mere statement of the fact has come to seem a kind of explanation of it. The real explanation more probably is conveyed in the saying of the Egyptian priest to Solon, in Plato's *Timaeus*: "O Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children, and old man among you there is none." "How so," asked Solon. "You are all young," said the priest, "in your souls; for you have in them no settled opinion confirmed through hearsay from of old, and no knowledge hoary with time." The infant nationalities of modern Europe were for many centuries the pupils of a religion which came to them with all the authority of that civilisation of which they were the heirs, and it was their part, not all at once to found a religion of their own, but to submit to authority, and to content themselves with such answers as were vouchsafed to their first questionings. The great religions, which have something in them to which a whole civilisation can look up, are the results of ages of silent thought, and of the independent contributions of many schools. Give

us a little time—at least a few centuries longer—and in the mouth of a new Buddha the conflicting tendencies of modern thought will blend in fresh oracles, as the lore of Babylon, Assyria, Persia and Egypt were blended in Judaism, or as Judaism was blended with the Greek spirit in Christianity. The Christian Church, deputed by ancient Rome to instruct the nations of the West, made modern civilisation possible by the unity which she imposed among these barbarous young Titans. But with the first manifestations of the thinking faculty in these nations, Christianity, as at first accepted, at once began to be modified in all of them. True, these nationalities soon found themselves ranged against one another under the names "Protestant" and "Catholic," the Protestant nations openly avowing their impious new departure in religious matters, while the Catholic nations made a parade of loyalty to their old teacher. But though without doubt the Protestant nations found themselves able, or obliged, to tolerate a freedom of thought considered disloyal in Catholic countries, we must not allow ourselves to think that these theologico-political terms represent any real division in that modern spirit which had awakened in Catholic and Protestant nations alike. As things have worked out, it has in fact come to be a matter of doubt whether the modern spirit gained so

much by having in Protestant countries the self-complacency and worldly indifference of the average man professedly on its side. In France, for instance, which till the present time has been called a Catholic country, chiefly because it never chose to call itself Protestant, or to modify the forms of its popular religion, the modern spirit has perhaps made things easier for itself than in any Protestant country. The terms have an historical and political, hardly an essentially religious meaning; and in all countries the real conflict is between intellectual hardihood and pious Epicureanism, between genius and indifference, knowledge and ignorance, initiative and irresolution. Perhaps fifty, almost certainly a hundred years hence, the terms Protestant and Catholic will be as obsolete as Whig and Tory are to-day. Except in Ireland, and one or two other countries where religion and politics insist on confusedly adopting one another's terms, the question of personal belief has generally come to be recognised as a very much deeper one than whether we are "Protestant" or "Catholic," "Christian" or "infidel." Our real beliefs belong to the subconscious part of our nature, and surprise, and perhaps horrify, ourselves as much as they could anyone else when they emerge occasionally.

Modern Ireland remains a "Catholic" country, more strictly than France or Spain,

chiefly, we must hold, because its religious consciousness in modern times has never really been awakened. We may even say that if Protestantism and Catholicism do indeed represent two essentially different religious tendencies, we are not yet able to say whether Ireland is naturally Protestant or Catholic, for the alternatives have never really been brought before it to choose between. There is even some reason to think that a country which produced Scotus Erigena and Virgil of Salzburg; a country to which Christianity first came in the form of the Pelagian heresy; a country in which the national Church at the height of the religious movement in the seventh century excited, by reason of its independent spirit, the keen hostility of the Mother Church at Rome, had a natural turn for what comfortable people call heresy, but what we prefer to call a disposition to take religious and intellectual questions seriously. The Celtic Church—a church, as Warren says, "having its own litany, its own translation of the Bible, its own mode of chanting, its own monastic rule, its own cycle for the calculation of Easter, and presenting both internal and external evidence of a complete autonomy"—was hardly, as has been pretended, an early form of Protestantism, but may at least be called a separate branch of the Apostolic Church; and the Epistles of St. Patrick, if they have not exactly a Lutheran flavour,

have at least one distinctly Pauline. There came very near to being another great branch of the Christian Church, beside the Greek and the Roman, namely, the Celtic, which, had the fates proved propitious, would in all likelihood have been the first to produce its Luther, its Pascal or its Tolstoi, and so have had its turn in the spiritual hegemony of Christendom.

The true nature of that extraordinary period of religious exaltation through which Ireland passed between the fifth and eighth centuries, and why it vanished without leaving any germ of development in the national character, will always perhaps remain something of a riddle. When we read of the solitaries who dwelt in the laurae of the Thebaid and of Palestine at the close of the antique ages, we are accustomed to think of them as fugitives from a corrupt civilisation. But in Ireland, a country of primitive institutions and manners, of nature-worship, and without even a word to express the notion of sin, suddenly appears all that passion for seclusion, for mortification and abnegation, the flight from the world, the ingenuity in contriving romantic forms of penance, and even something of the delight of solitary communion with nature, which we generally think of in connection with social decadence or revolution. It is necessary to believe both that Irish life included great extremes of good and evil, and that there was a

good deal in Druidism, or what the poets called the "old law of the men of Erin," which prepared them for Christianity. The old Celtic world, driven into narrow compass by the Roman empire, had seen its most sacred places desecrated with impunity, and was already filled with premonitory influences of Apostolic Christianity when the new faith made what we may call its state entry into the country with Patrick and his missionary band. The English had not yet landed at Thanet when the early missionaries, inconvenienced so far as one can learn mainly by some rough practical jokes of the old Druidic party, were freely wending their way about the country, distributing the Gospels and the books of the law. Some explanation of the prodigious success of the mission may doubtless be found in the character of Patrick, whom we have only to contrast with that dry ecclesiastic, Augustine of Canterbury, to see what the advantage was of having a religious genius at the head of an evangelical campaign. The author of the "Confession" (if not Patrick then some one else of the same name) "St. Patrick," as he is styled. though not we believe officially—"Patrick, a sinner," as he preferred to call himself—was indeed the last of the apostles, the spiritual brother of St. Paul, though, as we shall see presently, with limitations which remained the limitations of

Celtic Christianity. The bewilderment which he expresses at his own success ("I, a fool!") has all the naïveté of a great man unconscious of the magnetic power of a genuine personality. But besides the advantage of Patrick's personality, Christianity seems to have been able to profit by an imbroglio arising out of the defection from Druidism, about a century and a half previously, of the great King Cormac, who is said finally to have been slain by the Druids for having renounced their teaching. The bards, we may believe, went mostly with their king, and there was a consequent division between bardism and Druidism which proved highly serviceable to Patrick. Even in our own day, when so many of our poets and novelists are agnostics, theosophists, etc., we know that they have done a good deal to undermine established religion, and in the time of Patrick it is clear that with the bards on his side half the battle was gained. We read that on his arrival at the court of Laeghaire, the chief poet of Erin rose up to do honour to him at his entrance. In fact when Ireland became, as it presently did, an "Island of Saints," it would seem that the latter were chiefly converted bards, in whose way of life it did not perhaps at first make so very much difference to become "saints." The notion of acquiring supernatural power by means of fasting and chastity, and by a solitary life, was quite con-

genial and familiar to Druidism, as were also the doctrines of the one God and of immortality. The sacred and remote places of Druidism continued to be the sacred places of the monks, who had supplemented the old magic with the magic of baptism and the Psaltery. So close was the connection of Christianity with bardism that it seems to have been expected of a "saint" (and quite rightly) that he should also be "a bit of a poet;" and all their canticles bear witness, less to any real understanding of Christianity, than to an acknowledgment in it of a superior magic, as in the "Breastplates" of Patrick and of Columba:

"*I adore not the voice of birds,*
Nor a sneezing, nor a destiny, nor the earthly world,
Nor a son, nor chance, nor woman;
My Druid is Christ, the Son of God,
Christ the son of Mary, the great Abbot,
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Indeed, we have only to look anywhere into the Hymns or the Lives of the early saints to find support for our theory that these saints were chiefly bards cast loose from Druidism. That the Bards were numerous enough to make themselves a public nuisance from time to time is well known; and the close association of the early Church with the bards

appears in the account of the Convention of Drum-Ketta, more than a century after Patrick, when the Church came to the rescue of the bardic order, threatened with extinction by the High King. The immense number of these saints excites our suspicion almost as much as the number of bards raises one's doubts as to the existence among them of any genuine poet. Any rogue who had submitted his head to the tonsure, who fasted, and who could repeat the Psalter, was *ipso facto* a saint, just as the standing of a bard was determined by the number of tales he had by heart. Those devotees who made their abode on the top of the Skelligs or of Slieve Gullion; who got into coracles and drifted out to sea without oars or rudder, and sometimes threw away the loaves they had brought with them; or who tried in the name of Christ to float stones on the lake, were many of them, we may believe, the Quixotes of the old Druidic world, which indeed lingered on for many centuries after them. There is really nothing to choose between the morale of the bard and of the saint, as he appears in the legends, where he has parted with none of the privileges of magical power and authority. Columba himself has hardly more unction than Aitherne; and even his respected biographer Adamnan, we are told, retained a monk to tell his lies for him. The unregenerate character of the Irish saints

struck Giraldus Cambrensis, who wrote one of his chapters under the heading, "That the saints of this country appear to have been of a vindictive temper." There is nothing to indicate, what must of course have been to some extent the case, that Christianity came to Erin as the satisfaction of any speculative or spiritual need; nothing to compare, for example, with the speech of the Northumbrian alderman at the council held to consider the mission of Paulinus. The Apostolic fervour and self-consciousness which Patrick brought with him from Gaul were a good deal lost on the volatile men of Erin, and indeed it is absurd to think of him as converting the Irish in any sense in which Wesley or D. L. Moody would have understood the word. He came to exorcise demons, to baptize, to shave, not, as our patriotic poets and artists would have us believe, to conduct a series of evangelistic services. His impressive appearance and costume, the melodious moaning of his chanting clerics and bell-ringing on the silent plains, the magical clairvoyance which enabled him to see demons perched on the shoulders of kings, the impunity with which he violated the sacred rites of the Druids, his dangerous assiduity in prayer and fasting, and the formidable sincerity of his curses, all bespoke a superior power which confounded the magicians of ancient Erin, as Moses confounded

those of Egypt. His writings express no elation at the realization of his youthful dreams, and it must be confessed no great pleasure in the society of his new converts, whom he would gladly have left but that the "voices" which he heard had told him that he must not again return to his friends. He had brought the ends of the earth within the fold of the Church, yet the world continued, and he ceased wearily to take account of the number of persons whom he baptized so indiscriminately. He had turned the bards into clerics, and in the Ireland which he left behind him—in which the solemn note of personal religion in the "Confession" was not taken up by any of his successors—it was bardism which took advantage of the use of the writing-tablets which he had brought with him. The literature which rose in this country out of the mission of Patrick—unlike those literatures which rose in England and Gaul out of the missions of Augustine and Martin of Tours—is the expression of that primitive paganism which Christianity came to cast out.

It is interesting to remember these things at a time when a kind of extreme unction is being administered to the expiring language of this country, as "piety's own Celtic tongue;" whereas in truth Christianity never learned to express itself in Irish. The "Island of Saints," or Celtic Ireland, is that country which

throughout its whole history has never produced a saint, understanding by the word a religious genius. What strikes an outsider in first approaching the Irish language, with the patriotic intention of mastering it, is that it suffers from the same want from which the spirit of Irish nationality has suffered, namely, that it has never undergone a spiritual discipline; it still retains a rude flavour as of a language which has never properly been to school. It did not happen to the Irish language, as to the Anglo-Saxon, to lose and find itself, to go under bondage, to hew wood and draw water, and on a day to find itself stronger than its taskmaster and to enter into all his possessions. It is objected to the English language, on the other hand, that it is "saturated with Protestantism"—that "Teutonic development of Christianity" of which there has never been what seemed at first promised, a Celtic counterpart. The English language is saturated, at any rate, like all successful languages, with a spiritual quality, not derived exclusively or perhaps even chiefly from Anglo-Saxon sources, and certainly not from Protestantism, but from a long discipline and development through which it has come to be an element in which thought can breathe and minds live and produce after their kind. True, the history of the English language has given its thought a trend which perhaps may with a

little unfairness be styled, as Newman styled it, Protestant. But if the English language be saturated with Protestantism, with what is the Irish language saturated? Listen to the last mutterings of the "Grand Old Tongue," and you will hear it babbling of the fancies of its youth, in the days before Patrick. It was only with the introduction of the English language, and when Ireland began to be affected indirectly by the Reformation, that it became the pious nationality that we know.

THE DE-DAVISISATION OF IRISH LITERATURE.

It has been said that during the Middle Ages great men as a rule distinguished themselves in another country than that of their birth. If this may be still said of eminent men born in Ireland, it is easy enough to understand why it should be so, in respect to men of action and administrative faculty; but that literary men and men of thought are still impelled to leave this country in order to "find themselves" may be taken in association with a statement which is sometimes made, that Ireland has not as yet emerged properly out of the Middle Ages. To speak candidly, if cosmopolitanism be a fault, it has not always been the fault of these gifted sons of Ireland, from the time of Scotus Erigena, that they have become cosmopolitan, since they, as a rule, have remembered that they were Irishmen, while the mother-country has never had the heart to take much pride in pure intellectual achievement. The only distinctive national literary tradition, within its own coasts, acknowledged by Ireland, is mainly the creation of Thomas Davis, and had its point of departure in the anger felt by that excellent patriot when, as a young lawyer, he was brought into contact with the crass worldliness and provincialism of the official and

professional classes of Dublin, to which he himself belonged. The nationalism which he was driven to adopt was not exactly, perhaps, the ideal nationalism of his "Address to the Historical Society," with which he began his career, but suffered a little from compromise, as perhaps all ideal principles must do when practically applied. There are worldly people in every nation: a successful New York Irishman, for instance, is possibly as worldly a type as could be found; but in the nature of the case, the worldly people in Ireland were those descendants of the "English Colony," who still monopolised the prosperity of the country. To the inert weight of provincialism and indifference to the ideal of these people, Davis gave the somewhat fallacious name of Anglicism, or Anglicisation, and turned with passion to the great peasant population of Celtic Ireland, with its ancient language and history, its affiliation to the soil and geography of the country, its long-suffering under centuries of persecution, its freedom, at all events, from what he describes as "that damned thing . . . call it Yankeeism or Englishism, which measures prosperity by exchangeable value, measures duty by gain, and limits desire to clothes, food and respectability." It was, no doubt, a worldly time in England especially, the time of Bentham's influence and of the successes of Macaulay: and already

at that time in England there had arisen in the person of a Scottish peasant, Thomas Carlyle, a prophet against worldliness, whose influence was already rousing the talent of the strongest writer whom the national cause of Ireland has yet had on its side, John Mitchel. It was Davis, however, who gave a sort of religious or idealistic status to modern Irish patriotism which it has retained; for since Davis the true religion of the Irish Nationalist has been patriotism; and it remains to be decided whether this confusion of two essentially different things, idealism and patriotism, has bestowed upon Irish national literature the germs of new developments or is not rather that which must be got rid of before even the meaning of the term "national literature" is understood.

The genius of Davis himself (who, it must be remembered, died at the age of thirty-one, after a few years of activity, and so was prevented from becoming, what perhaps he might have become to a full extent, a kind of Irish Lessing) succeeded in giving Ireland a brilliant journal, but not exactly literature. The one book of the '48 Movement—written by a kind of accident, and still (though in an exceptional way) *out* of Ireland—was the work of a man, in some respects, of a less admirable character than Davis, yet his superior in that abnormal power of spiritualised egoism which

makes the writing-man. It was the lion-hearted, if somewhat wrong-headed Mitchel, who began to use a hearty directness of statement in regard to all matters which affected or interested him, which had hardly been heard in Ireland since the days of Dean Swift. In his Journal and Correspondence (or those fragments of it which are given in his Life by Dillon) as compared with the writings of Davis, we can see the difference between literature and rhetoric, which is mainly that, while rhetoric has in mind some particular audience, literature is the faithful and unbiassed rendering of the individual impression. The two elements of rhetoric and literature meet in that kind of writing, designed to catch the attention of the average man in his average hours, to which, not very happily, we give the name "journalism;" and in journalism Davis (who indeed was rather an ideal editor than what Mr. T. W. Rolleston has called him, "the ideal Irishman") succeeded so well that he and his colleagues imposed the tradition of their newspaper on Irish national literature. What the Irish nationalist, as instructed by Davis, means by "national literature," is not the interpretation of the soul of a people, still less the emancipation of the national mind by means of individual utterance, but—no doubt a very good thing—the expression of such

sentiments as help to exalt an Irishman's notion of the excellence and importance of the race to which he belongs. Our friends, the Gaelic Leaguers, who hold that the English language at the best is an unsuitable vehicle of thought for Irishmen, and who have lately shown signs of ingratitude to the memory of Davis, are ready, no doubt, to accept this implied qualification of his praise, and to use it as an argument on their side; but in the *Jail Journal* of Mitchel, written far away from an audience, and in order to satisfy an overmastering need of self-expression, we do at last get literature, a book so successful in giving expression to the instincts and antipathies of Irish nationality, that, in face of it, any further talk of the inefficiency of the English language in Ireland is somewhat audacious. The literary interest of this book was at once recognised in Paris by M. Emile Montégut, who devoted to it a lengthy article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Tome 10, 1855); an article which every Irishman, who wishes to "see himself as others see him," should read. Mitchel afterwards wrote of himself as a man who "but once in his life [1847-8] was possessed by a great cause, whose whole life and energy converged themselves once to one focus, and were then dissipated into the general atmosphere;" but it is quite certain that so far as concerns his

literary activity—for we are not here concerned with the political principles which brought him into unpleasant relations with two Governments, and very nearly with a third, and which allowed him to become the fierce champion of slavery—no other book of his has half the literary value of the *Jail Journal*, which, for many young Irish patriots, has made him the Defoe of the hulks.

There is a class of enthusiasts who pin their faith to an order of things which might have been, if something else had not happened. Thus, a goodly number hold that Christianity was an unpardonable infraction of the pagan ideal. To others, the Renaissance appears to have been the great mistake. A larger number, of course, regret the movements represented by Luther and Rousseau. English music, it is claimed, was certain of a fine career of national development, if the burly Handel had not thrown it out of its bearings. And so on. There is more to be said for the language movement, no doubt, than that it is merely the championship of one of these lost causes; one must indeed be blind not to see the poetry of this proposal to raise up around our coasts, not Bishop Berkeley's impracticable wall of brass, but a still more irrefragable if impalpable safeguard of nationality in a language bristling with difficulties to a foreigner, but within full of the kindly converse of

hearts unsealed at last. It must be confessed, however, that when Anglo-Irish literature has brought us at least so far as the literary integrity and hearty directness of John Mitchel, it seems a pity if the "Language Movement" is to transport literature in this country back again to that point where the good Davis left it, to that region, which has become now somewhat insipid, in which all private differences are sunk, and in which the Irishman has to speak in his national rather than in his human capacity. For the questions which divide household and nation against themselves, religious, political, fundamental questions, these are the questions in respect to which the literary man must have the license of a prophet; it is these which he looks on as his peculiar region; it is these upon which literature, more than any other agency, can hope to shed some light. Literature must be free as the elements; if that is to be cosmopolitan it must be cosmopolitan. Literature, even when it is really national, is not a matter about which any nation, fortunately for its peace of mind, gives itself great concern. It proceeds quietly in the pursuit of truth and wisdom, and occasionally attracts attention to itself as an elemental force by an electric discharge of thought: whereupon follows, as a rule, one of those regrettable movements already mentioned, and the relegation of the reigning

system of thought to the status of a lost cause. If the Irish nation is a literary nation it is a very wonderful nation. But no! the "cold chain of silence" will never be lifted from the soul of Ireland save by men using the homely directness of utterance, and, without much doubt, the speech of John Mitchel; and one would like to live to see the day of what might be termed, without any disrespect to Davis, the de-Davisisation of Irish national literature, that is to say, the getting rid of the notion that in Ireland, a writer is to think, first and foremost, of interpreting the nationality of his country, and not simply of the burden which he has to deliver. The expression of nationality, literature cannot fail to be; and the richer, more varied and unexpected that expression the better.

THE BEST IRISH POEM.

"As certain also of your own poets have said."

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a name rose into prominence in England which was a baleful star to poetry, a name at which Eros paused in his ranging and grew pale, recognising a threatened end to that great period of his apotheosis during which he had become the inseparable companion of the nine muses and been held equally in honour with them—the name of Malthus. The modern study of literature has taught us to see every literary movement in relation to the philosophical theories and social changes of the time, and we might almost say that the first formulation of the Malthusian theory—or the theory that population tends to increase at a rate in excess of the means of subsistence—was the signal for poetry to betake itself to the interpretation of nature and of the individual life, and no longer to be the mouthpiece of those warlike and reproductive instincts which make for mighty nations. For the poet is of all men most susceptible to any changes in the intellectual climate of his age, and the slightest cloud in the metaphysical or speculative sky often causes a fatal rift in his lute. The poets were at once up in arms against Malthus: Shelley, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, all protested against this cruel demonstration by a

Church of England clergyman of the blindness of Cupid. "I had rather be damned with Plato," said Shelley, "than go to heaven with Malthus!" "This abominable tenet," exclaimed Coleridge, "disgraceful to man as a Christian, a philosopher, a statesman, or a citizen!" But that the arguments of Malthus had struck home, at least so far as the poets were concerned, is clear from their subsequent fortunes. Already had come the epoch-marking defection of Wordsworth and the almost complete change in the venue of poetry brought about by his withdrawal from civic life to his native mountains; and in the next generation we find the poets either faithful to the magnificent prospectus of the new poetry which he prefixed to *The Excursion* or else battling pathetically with theological and sociological spectres, and endeavouring to lay the hateful ghost of doubt. It is only historic visionaries like William Morris or belated *jongleurs* like Swinburne, who adhere obstinately to the old themes, as though the sun of a new era were not already well up in the sky. Generally speaking, in spite of the reassurances of such writers as Henry George, the poets have never quite got over the depression caused by the "theory" of Malthus, and it would seem as though the reproduction of one generation by another were a process which must now go

forward unattended by the gratulatory chorus of the poets: indeed it is hardly among those naturally selected for the continuation of the species that they find now-a-days either their chief audience or inspiration. One and all, the poets turn with an increasing aversion from the noisy and unlovely centres of population to the calm and solitude of nature; obeying an instinct perhaps not essentially different from that which drove the Christian ancestors of the modern world into the wilderness.

The "population question" meant a different thing to that poet of County Clare who in 1780 wrote what has been called "the most tasteful composition in modern Irish," *The Midnight Court (Cuirt an Mheadhoin Oidhche)*. The Munster poets of the eighteenth century, in whose idealism there is none of the pessimist alienation from the joy of life of the later English poets, produced a literature which has not yet found its critical interpreter; an office which, we may wonder, is not taken over by someone like Mr. Stephen Gwynn or Mr. T. W. Rolleston, whose knowledge of Gaelic enables them to enjoy in the original poetry for which such high claims are made as that of Owen Roe O'Sullivan, Egan O'Rahilly, etc. We need not wonder that the penal times produced poets whose main themes were wine, women and joviality, any more than we

need wonder that Calvinistic Scotland produced Burns. Perhaps, indeed, the dear Irishman is never so unconvincing as when he talks, as he is so fond of doing, of the horrible events of the penal times, as if they were entirely undeserved, or as if, from his own point of view, they did not prove a blessing in disguise. But for the penal regulations, Ireland would doubtless have been, at the time of O'Connell, as much an English-speaking country as Scotland. The modern Gaelic movement is in direct descent from the battle of the Boyne, which threw the Celtic world back on itself, and arrested that disintegration of the old language which was already far advanced. The penal regulations were a very mild form of that discipline to which every race which has ever done anything in the world has been at some time subjected, and the lack of which till then in Ireland is probably the cause of its having missed hitherto both that political and literary destiny for which the Irishman, both physically and mentally, is so well fitted. As it was, that period proved, so far as matters could at so late a date be mended, his salvation. With nothing to do but to keep quiet, Gaelic Ireland at length achieved in its own despite something like unity. The population steadily increased, and whereas at the beginning of the seventeenth century there were only about half a million

Gaelic speakers in Ireland, by the end of the eighteenth century a big nation had come into existence, which has been the main problem of the British Empire ever since. As regards literature, this period was, by all accounts, the golden age of Irish poetry. Not only did many of the mediæval tales and poems then receive their final shape, but a sudden expansion of form and metre brought into the poems of the Celts the passion and genius of their melodies. During the "Augustan age" of English literature poems were written in Ireland which have far more in common with later developments of English poetry—with poems, for example, like Shelley's *When the Lamp is Shattered* or George Meredith's *Love in the Valley*—than anything produced by the "wits" of the London coffee-houses. These poets, however, were only strong in the expression of the primordial instincts. When he "begins to think," the Celtic poet is not so much, as Heine said of Byron, "a child," as a nasty bigot. The stock-in-trade images of unregenerate Irish nationalism are all of his creation: Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the Soggarth Aroon, the Saxon tyrant, the jolly good fellow. Ironical, sensual, gregarious, and too clever by half, the Irish poet enables one to understand how tough a problem was presented in the Irish temperament to evangelists like Ignatius

Loyola and Wesley, who both entertained the vain ambition of repeating in Ireland the legendary success of Patrick.

Yet that there is no natural limitation in the Irish mind which disqualifies it for "dealing boldly with substantial things," or for free speculation, is sufficiently proved in the poem already mentioned, *The Midnight Court*, of Brian Merriman, now published and translated in the *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* by L. C. Stern. The steady increase in the population had already begun to overflow in that stream of emigration to America and to the large towns in Ireland and Great Britain, which, with another cause mentioned in the poem, deprived the country of its best and most enterprising young men. What remedy for this evil? is the question discussed by Merriman. The form is the mediæval *Aisling*, or vision. The poem opens with a fine description of daybreak on a summer morning in the county Clare.

"*My heart rejoiced as I looked on Loch Greine,*
The fields, the soil, and the width of the skies,
The mountains lying serene and lovely,
One over the other uplifting their tops.
Dried up though it be, the heart rejoices,
Spent and nerveless and filled with pains;
The embittered hungerer, owning nothing,
Looks forth for a little while over the woods!"

Wandering on until exhausted the poet lies down and falls asleep. A woman of giant form appears to him in a dream and upbraids him with his sloth. Does he not see how the people are hurrying to the Court, no court of robbers who have "sworn on the Bible the destruction of the poor," but a court of the queen and high dignitaries of the fairies who befriend Munster, and who are met to hear the complaints of "the poor, the good, and of women." There is a want of men in Erin. The high spirit of the old race has gone over the seas, and the young men are doing nothing to replace it. Without further parley the poet, as helpless as Chaucer in the claws of the eagle in the *House of Fame*, is seized and borne over the valleys to the court at Feakle.

He there finds a company assembled in a stately room lighted with torches (it is midnight in his dream), and standing at a table, with tear-stained face and excited gesture, a maiden is laying before Aoibhell, the Queen, the sad case of the women of Erin, who through neither choice nor fault of their own have to live "like black nuns." It is only the old, not young and proper men, who will marry. She enumerates her own charms, and describes without reserve her frustrated efforts to secure a mate, urging that some compulsion be brought to bear on the young men. In

answer to this an old man rises and pours forth vindictive abuse of the women of Erin, which he illustrates by an account of his own mésalliance. The young men of Erin, he contends, only show their prudence in refusing to marry; and he makes a grumbling allusion to the high fee (three guineas and a crown, as the German editor reminds us) which the poor man had then to pay the Church for the privilege. But if it be true, as he admits, that the "race of men is degenerating on the soil of green and delightful Erin," there is an "easy way of peopling it once again with heroes," without the "useless and meaningless" help of the priest. Abolish marriage. Let noble blood combine with peasant vigour to produce a worthier race. Proclaim through the land freedom to young and old. Such a law will breed again wit and sinew in the Gael, and the men of the land will have "chest, back, and fists like Goll."

The reply of the first speaker to this is serious and crushing:

"God willed that the mother should not be forsaken.
In women's behoof have the prophets ruled!"

She defends the delinquent in the old man's case in language which drops out of the decorous pages of the German review, but is led on by his proposal to contrast such dotards

as he with the fine young men who are lost to the country in the church. "My heart is filled with grief, and in perplexity I wonder at one thing, what has exempted the clergy from the bond of marriage? For languishing maidens it is a sad sight, their muscular build and comeliness, jovial countenance, and sparkling smile . . . They live in luxury at table, with comfort and money for drink and pleasure; they have beds of down and nourishing meats, with cakes and comfits and wine and jesting; they are trusty and able and young and sociable, and as we all know, made of flesh and blood like ourselves!"

"I say nothing," she goes on, "of the awkward chatterbox, the gouty grumbler, the disconsolate booby, no, my business is with the simple and stout fellows who snore and do no work. I think certainly that many might still take orders, and I allow them! We must not, in justice, hang the whole company, condemning all to the rope, nor would I sink the ship for the sake of one man. Many of them, indeed, are no good, and many are unregulated and not to be trusted, niggardly, unsympathetic, without virtue, rough and cold, hateful to women! But the most of them are better, filled with love and of a noble nature. By their help we often attain a thing of value, a jewel, a cask, or grain. Their virtues are extolled, I know it, and many a

clever and proper deed of theirs. Often, too, in the country have I heard a whisper running round that the gentlemen have their love-affairs . . . "

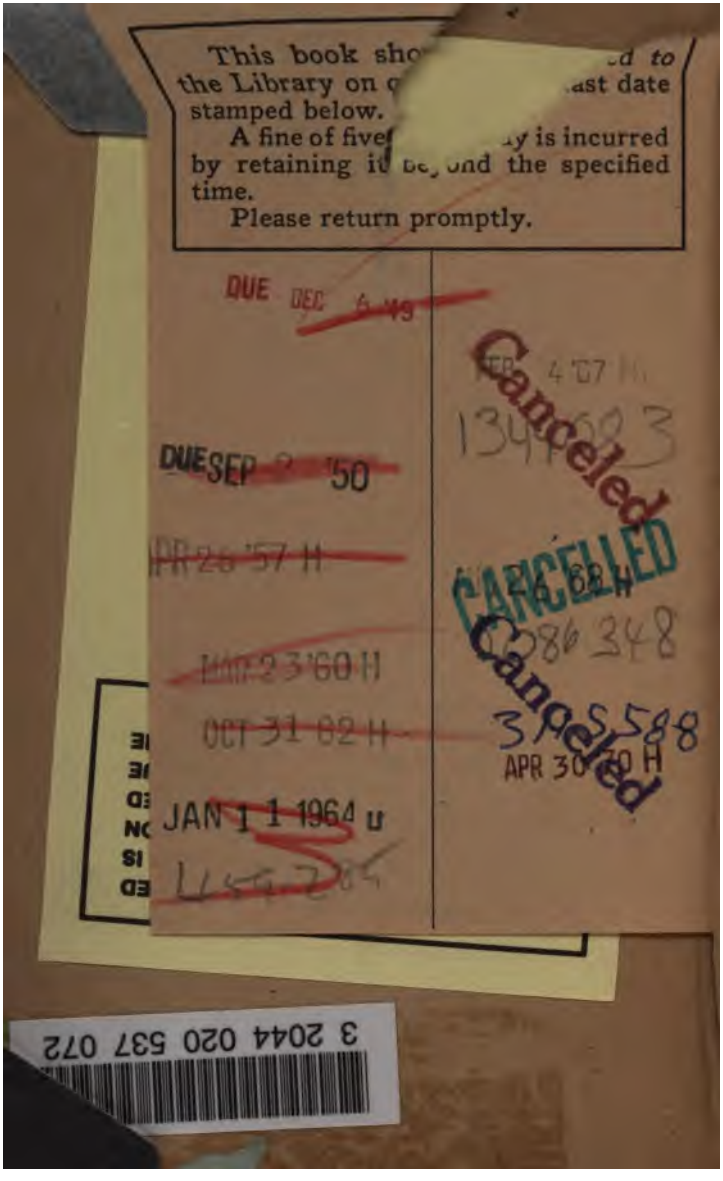
"A sorrow on the land it is, and a wrong to women, this senseless obligation of the clergy. A bitter grief it is for Ireland, what we have lost by this aimless law. Wise Queen! I lay before you my complaint—the law which binds the priests! My little confidence is shaken, I am as one who sees not—enlighten me, and tell me, for you know it, the speech of the prophet, the royal apostle's living word! Where is the rule ordained by the Creator, of the killing of the flesh in the priestly tonsure? Saint Paul said not, as I think, to shun marriage, but rather lust; to leave your kindred, however high you be, and life-long to cleave to the wife. But it were a vain thing for one such as I to expound to you the sense of the law."

Finally, the queen pronounces judgement. She finds a true bill against the men of Erin, and henceforth whoever of them is twenty-one and unmarried is to be handed over to be whipped. As regards the remedy proposed by the plaintiff, she says: "Speak it softly and tell it not above a whisper, your hand over your mouth, for talk is risky: just at present you need not disturb those charming gentlemen—it is coming to marriage with them,

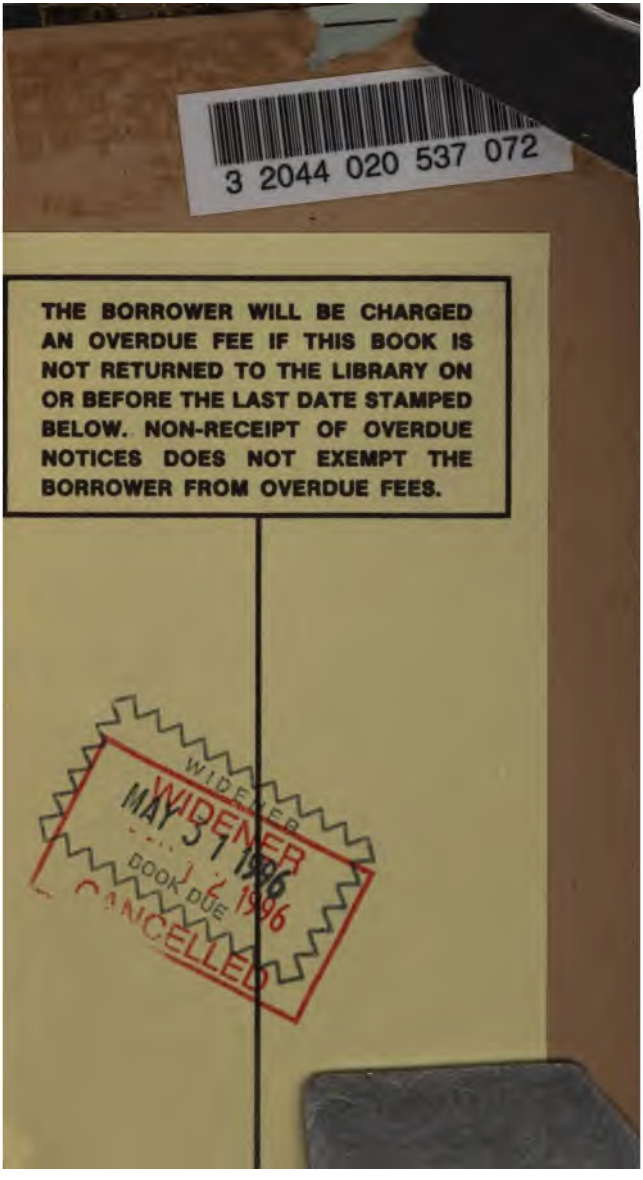
you will see it yet! The day will arrive of the great dispensation, the Pope himself will put his hand to it. He will find that this community is hurtful to the land, and soon you will have free for the marriage-bond those fine fellows who take your fancy!" The poet now finds himself to his discomfiture the object of general attention. He is hailed forward to the table by his conductor, and convicted of being thirty and unmarried. In a clever and amusing passage he gets in an account of himself, his personal appearance and habits, his popularity with the gentry (Merriman had acted as tutor in several houses), his musical gifts—it is plain that he deserves no mercy. They decide to make a terrible example of him, and sentence him to be flayed alive! The date of this important decision is being called out in the court when the poet—awakes.

It would be unbecoming in us to add anything to the judicious words of Aoibhell in summing up this delicate case. The vexed question of a celibate clergy, is it not discussed exhaustively in the pages of Lea and of Lecky? We will only say that if ever the event prophesied by this Irish freethinker of the eighteenth century should come to pass, it will not be owing to any decisive battle in religious controversy, but to the awakening in Ireland by means of general culture of the historic

sense. Every institution has its justification in some mood or phase of human development of which it survives as the monument. Monasticism has played as great a part in the history of human culture as the Renaissance. For our own part we may regard the existence in Ireland of a celibate priesthood, which undoubtedly withdraws from the population the "fittest," both mentally and physically, of the "men of Erin"—as Huxley pointed out, the two qualifications go together oftener than we suppose—as the outward sign of that mediævalism which has only in our own day begun to break up in Ireland.


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